

Exhibit 5

Declaration of Eric Rassbach

Jewish students express concern over antisemitism on UCLA campus

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UCLA's Murphy Hall, which houses the UCLA office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, is pictured. Students complained about the handling of recent complaints about antisemitism by the office. (Dylan Winward/Daily Bruin senior staff)



By Dylan Winward and Catherine Hamilton

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Since Oct. 7, Jewish student Gabby – who was granted partial anonymity for safety reasons – said she has not felt safe on campus.

“I myself have been bullied and harassed online,” she said. “I know people that have been involved in physical altercations.”

Students, including Gabby, expressed concerns about rising antisemitism on campus over the past month after an Oct. 7 attack by militant group and Palestinian political party Hamas on villages in southern Israel resulted in what Israel's foreign ministry estimates to be 1,200 deaths, according to Reuters, with Hamas continuing attacks on the region since. In response, Israel launched a ground invasion of the Gaza Strip along with bombings and airstrikes, which the Hamas-run Gaza health ministry said has collectively killed over 11,000 people, according to the Associated Press.

Campus organizations have held multiple events to raise awareness of the Oct. 7 attacks and call for the release of hostages taken by Hamas. Jewish student organizations, such as Bruins for Israel and Hillel at UCLA, have held rallies and vigils calling for the return of hostages taken by Hamas.

However, there have also been a number of alleged incidents of antisemitic harassment on college campuses since October, according to The New York Times.

Kian Kohanteb, a third-year political science student who is a member of the leadership of several Jewish organizations, said he feels this rise has also occurred at UCLA.

"I think a lot of Jewish students, since Oct. 7, do not feel safe on our campus," he said. "They do not feel safe to go to a lot of the Jewish buildings such as Hillel and Chabad, and I think it's coming from a time of heightened antisemitism across the country – specifically on college campuses themselves."

Bella Brannon, the student president of Hillel at UCLA, said she has seen a swastika carved into a tree on campus and experienced people making comments that perpetuate antisemitic stereotypes during meetings.

"Seeing so many students not being able to conceptualize that what they're saying is antisemitic and is wrong is tough," Brannon said.

Dan Gold, executive director of Hillel at UCLA, said students have been called Zionists on social media, and he feels that faculty members have tried to demonize the Jewish community by speaking on subjects outside of their academic fields during class.

"The challenging environment is that the form of antisemitism that we're often experiencing, especially since Oct. 7, is a form of antisemitism that has become normal," Gold said.

He said he is not aware of any reports of physical violence against Jewish students.

However, Gabby, who helped organize a rally supporting Israel, said she has experienced online harassment since the start of the Israel-Hamas war. She added that she has worked with private security companies to help ensure that she and other students attending rallies are safe.

“When I walk on campus, I’m not just scared about verbal altercations, but I’m honestly scared for my life,” Gabby said. “And I know many students in the community feel the same way.”

Kohanteb added that his organizations are considering increased safety measures for Jewish students and have hired professional security at events.

Gold said he believes rallies in support of Palestine have made Jewish students feel unsafe on campus. He added that he feels that chants such as “Resistance is justified when people are occupied” and “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” are statements intended to intimidate others.

Kohanteb said he feels some of the chants are antisemitic, adding that he knows some Jewish students who have skipped classes because they were uncomfortable walking through these rallies.

Claims of antisemitism have also followed other recent rallies.

At a Nov. 8 rally in support of Palestine, which was hosted by Students for Justice in Palestine and UC Divest Coalition at UCLA, participants were invited to destroy piñatas with pictures of United States President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on them.

In a Nov. 10 campuswide email, Chancellor Gene Block said he condemns incidents of antisemitism, adding that administration officials are reviewing footage from alleged incidents with the goal of holding people accountable.

Benjamin Kersten, a member of Jewish Voice for Peace at UCLA – a coalition of Jewish students who support Palestinian liberation – said he thinks it is important to distinguish between antisemitism and anti-Zionism. However, they added that they and their organization believe that Jewish grief is being used as a justification for oppression in the Gaza Strip.

“There’s been a lot of repression on campus and a lot of claims that criticism of the state of Israel or that anti-Zionism is antisemitic,” Kersten said. “We’re here to very soundly say that that’s not the case. We’re loud and proud anti-Zionist Jews who feel very rooted in our Jewishness and in our values of equality and justice.”

Brannon said while she appreciates that the administration has made statements in support of Jewish students, she feels there is more that it could do. She added that she has heard of instances of Jewish students not receiving responses to complaints they sent to the UCLA Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

Kohanteb said he feels the university should offer more guidance for students about what constitutes hate speech because he feels some students are ignorant when it comes to antisemitic tropes.

“I’m scared sometimes that hate usually comes from ignorance,” he said. “If we can inform students of what is and what isn’t antisemitic, and where that line is, I think it’d be very beneficial to all.”

Dylan Winward | News editor

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